

## **Man and Woman in God**

By Bishop George Khodr

Why do you fast? Because you are in dire need of God. And in the Christian understanding, because you are hungry for Him as your food, as His Son has said: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger." (John 6: 34). Is the Quran verse "He has brought down to us a table from heaven that is a feast for our beginning and our end." (Al Mai'ida:114) The orientalist Massignon saw that the above two quotes are synonymous. This ongoing feasting has been changed by the ascetics to ongoing fasting in which there is abstinence from food since they consider that their food is the remembrance of God. They did not know the distinction, present in Western theology, between the natural and the supernatural. You would be surprised when you read them to find out that they did not accept what is common and they did not consider the extent of their abstinence and the fortitude in it as supernatural or miraculous.

I am always amazed, when I read them, at the fact that they did not focus on human nature and the power it has though they have spoken against exaggeration. But, nowadays, when we consider what they have accomplished, we find it unbelievable. According to the laws of Natural Science they were supposed to die; but they did not die. In our standards they have breached all the principles of Science to the point that drives us to ask: why did they do all what they did? Was that asceticism necessary?

Knowing that all the pagan religions of the East arose from the worship of sex (Aphrodite, Ishtar and Ashtarout), we can understand why our Fathers kept themselves away from that worship and practice and we can understand why the Fathers were so keen on chastity and on being alert as to the ways of the body and the flesh. For instance it was such alertness that made them say that if you do not control greediness for food, it would be hard for you to attain to other virtues. And Freud said that in his psychoanalysis which has nothing to do with religion. Our Fathers have said that all passions work together, one leading to the other before the modern thinkers said that. They knew through their spiritual experience what modern science has discovered. With that experience they spoke of the correlation that is found among the pleasures and they said that when one fights extravagance and indulgence in food, he would be fighting all other enticements of the flesh since all pleasures are interconnected.

I feel offended by the ignorance of those who accuse Christianity of being "against the body" while Christianity only speaks against the wantonness of the flesh and uncontrolled desires. Was not the body first portrayed in Christian art? Was not the trumpet for the medical care of the body blown high in the civilized Christian countries? But the enticement of the body and the flesh has been the

common industry of other cultures also other than Christianity. Does not the book "Kitab al Aghani", collected by Abu Al Faraj Al Isfahani and composed by non-Christian authors, go deep into the "bodily" and the "fleshly"? Is not the least that one can say of the saying that the East is spiritual and the West is erotic that it is untrue and inaccurate?

At that we cannot but say that we did not import that worship of sex from the West. One would find it strange that erotic poetry (Al Ghazal) dominates the literary poetic expression of the Arabs since the Sixth Century A.D., while, during the first Millennium, one finds no trace of it in the literary expression of the Christian peoples. Going back to pagan worship in Phoenicia and Mesopotamia, and to love-making practices in the our East like the marriage among siblings in ancient Egypt, we notice that our people in the East were not as chaste as other peoples were. In literary expression, the ones who innovated erotic poetry were the Hebrews, and after that came the erotic poetry of the Arabs. "And the poets are followed by the debauched" (Al Shua'ara'a 224). Singing the praises of the body started here in the East at a time when Europe was still pure. While there was no censure over the erotic writings of the East a millennium ago, the Catholic Church used to fight against the culture of the theater.

Some of the "fables" invented by the contemporary critics are that the Church has always been against the body. The truth is that the Church is against fornication and adultery and not against the wholesome love that exists between the male and the female. I have never seen a greater "praise" of marriage than that which we see in the marriage celebration in the Christian Church. The matrimonial prayers in our Church is "poetry". You might want to consider marriage as a contract, but this is the minimal type of a bond between a man and a woman. And you hear read in Church in the wedding that marriage is an icon of what we call the "sacramental bond" (that is the one that exists in the mystery of God) and that mystery is reflected in the coming together of the bride and the bridegroom.

In Cristianity, we do not have a mere contract. Everything in it is a Divine Mystery; that is a covenant between God and Man. And God is the one who initiates the covenant and establishes it. In Christianity, we do not have one aspect of our life that is merely civil or human and another which is only Divine; in Christianity all is divine and human at the same time. All that we have construed as theology is according to the image of the incarnated Lord; and when we say that Man comes from God, we mean to say that he is in the image of what the Christ would be like, that is an incarnated God.

We are not in the image of Christ as the incarnate God, nor are we in His mere human image since that is our image. We are in the image of the incarnated God in that we are apt to receive the Divine eternal grace. In the likeness of Christ, we come from God and we go back to Him but He has taken one body and we are

in another. And as He went back to His Father in His resurrected body, we likewise go back to Him first at death and second at the last resurrection. And our death is the beginning of “tasting” the resurrection.

The woman and the man are one, but they are so in the Lord. I do not deny the oneness they have as both being human, but that is not revealed at its depth and breadth unless it is in God. There is no separation in our Church between what is on the natural plane and what is on the supernatural plane. The Lord ties this nature with that which transcends it and elevates it so that it would become the language of God and His tool.

Psychologists speak of the complementarity between the two sexes. Yet if that is not in God the relation between them can turn into one of feuding to the point of complete breakdown. They also speak of a tension between the two sexes. What is important to know here is that the attraction between the sexes is threatened by an enmity between them which often appears in married life.

The natural attraction is not enough in bonding people; there is the desire in one to dominate the other between the two sexes. Natural attraction is the other face of the coin of natural enmity which can develop into murder. The man is not a guarantee for the woman nor is she that for him. That relationship is flavored at the least with good education and at the most with spirituality. The human being is not a machine; he would be one if the Spirit does not move him. The human being is first a natural entity that is a body; but he is called to receive God in him.

Man is the fruit of God through a calling or else nothing in him is. With that he is raised above this earth. And his earthliness is brightened with the Divine splendor when he accepts God’s rearing of him.

Humanity is a term used for man and woman together. And Genesis has identified humanity as both, male and female. The intention of the writer of that book is that humanity is complete with both male and female being together. But the danger in this is that the accomplishment of humanity is in their mere togetherness. Their togetherness should be that of love. And love does not proceed from their nature. Love comes from the heart and not on its own. It is planted there by Divine Love. As such the heart becomes whole because of the Lord who dwells in it.

That was to affirm that man and woman in their togetherness which is according only to nature is lacking. God makes the male human through his love for the female and vice versa. God remains ‘creating’ after the creation has been over with; that is He is always renewing it. We are perennially in the bosom of the Father; otherwise we would die of lack of “warmth”.

Warmth is only in God. Before we truly get to God, all is but a mirage. Nothing in this world can be realized unless we see ourselves as being in the bosom of God.